

REMARKS

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 42-48, 50-52 and 54-57 are presented for consideration. Claims 42, 50, 51, 56 and 57 are independent. Claims 44, 47, 48, 50-52 and 55 have been amended to clarify features of the subject invention. Support for these changes can be found in the original application, as filed. Therefore, no new matter has been added.

Applicant notes with appreciation that claims 42-48, 51, 52, 56 and 57 have been allowed over the art of record. Applicants submit that the foregoing changes to claims 44, 47, 48, 51 and 52 are editorial in nature and do not affect the allowability of these claims. Therefore, claims 42-48, 51, 52, 56 and 57 should remain allowable. In addition to these claims being allowable, Applicants submit that claims 50, 54 and 55 patentably define features of the invention. Accordingly, Applicants request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action.

Claims 50, 54 and 55 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,451,507 to Suenaga et al. in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,829,939 to Iwai. Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach many features of the present invention, as previously recited in independent claim 50. Therefore, this rejection is respectfully traversed. Nevertheless, Applicants submit that independent claim 50, for example, as presented, amplifies the distinctions between the present invention and the cited art.

In one aspect of the present invention, independent claim 50 recites a stocker for stocking a substrate covered with a substrate cover. The stocker includes a sealing member, having a stocking station within, for storing the substrate covered with the substrate cover, on the stocking station, a first atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of the substrate cover of the substrate stored by the stocking station, to a first atmosphere, and a second atmosphere controller for controlling a space between an interior of the sealing member and an exterior of the substrate cover of the substrate stored on the stocking station, to a second atmosphere. An oxygen concentration of the second atmosphere is higher than an oxygen concentration of the first atmosphere and is lower than an oxygen concentration of an exterior of the sealing member.

By such an arrangement, in the present invention recited in independent claim 50, a substrate can be covered by a substrate cover, at a first atmosphere, which, in turn, is covered by a sealing member, at a second atmosphere. As recited in independent claim 50, the space between the interior of the sealing member and the exterior of the substrate cover can be controlled to be at a second atmosphere, of which an oxygen concentration is lower than an oxygen concentration of the exterior of the sealing member, and an interior of the substrate cover can be controlled to be at a first atmosphere, of which an oxygen concentration is lower than an oxygen concentration of the second atmosphere. In this manner, atmospheric control for each of the spaces is performed so that the oxygen concentration can be phased out.

Accordingly, in the present invention recited in independent claim 50, even if there is a gap in part of the substrate cover, since the substrate cover is provided between the sealing member and the substrate, and atmospheric control for space is performed so that the oxygen

concentration can be phased out, the present invention is able to prevent the atmosphere of the exterior of the sealing member from directly flowing into the interior of the substrate cover, which would otherwise significantly degrade the atmosphere in the interior of the substrate cover.

Still further, in the present invention recited in independent claim 50, an object to be controlled to the first atmosphere can be limited to the interior of the substrate cover, rather than an interior of the sealing member, so that a load of the first atmosphere controller can be decreased. In addition, since a space between an exterior of the substrate cover and an interior of the sealing member can be controlled to the second atmosphere, instead of the first atmosphere, a load on the second atmospheric controller can be decreased.

Applicants submit that the cited art does not teach or suggest such features of the present invention, as recited in independent claim 50.

The Iwai patent discusses controlling an interior of a substrate cover to a predetermined atmosphere, whereas the Suenaga et al. patent discusses controlling an interior of a sealing member stocking a substrate to a predetermined atmosphere. The Examiner asserts that it would have been obvious from a combination of the teachings of the Iwai and Suenaga et al. patents to control a space between an exterior of a substrate cover and an interior of a sealing member to a second atmosphere and to control an interior of the substrate cover to a first atmosphere, in the manner of the present invention recited in independent claim 50. Applicants submit, however, that even if the Iwai and Suenaga et al. patents were considered in combination, that combination does not teach or suggest the salient features of Applicants' present invention, as recited in independent claim 50, in which an oxygen concentration of the second atmosphere is higher than

an oxygen concentration of the first atmosphere and is lower than an oxygen concentration of an exterior of the sealing member. Applicants submit, therefore, that even a combination of the Iwai and Suenaga et al. patents would not teach or suggest the advantages provided by the subject invention recited in independent claim 50 such as performing atmospheric control for each of the spaces, including an inner space, so that the oxygen concentration can be phased out. Accordingly, Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach or suggest the salient features of Applicants' present invention, as recited in independent claim 50.

For the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that the present invention, as recited in independent claim 50, also is patentably defined over the cited art.


Dependent claims 54 and 55 also should be deemed allowable, in their own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in their respective independent claims. Further individual consideration of these dependent claims is requested.

Applicants further submit that this Amendment After Final Rejection clearly places this application in condition for allowance. This Amendment was not earlier presented because Applicants believed that the prior Amendment placed the application in condition for allowance. Accordingly, entry of the instant Amendment, as an earnest attempt to advance prosecution and reduce the number of issues, is requested under 37 CFR 1.116.

Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejection is set forth in the above-noted Office Action and an early Notice of Allowance are also requested.

Applicants' attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,


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